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Contact: Darren Rogers
Senior Director, Communications & Media Services
Churchill Downs Racetrack
(502) 636-4461 (office)
(502) 345-1030 (mobile)
Darren.Rogers@KyDerby.com

JAPAN ROAD TO KENTUCKY DERBY CONTINUES WEDNESDAY WITH UNBEATEN LE VENT SE LEVE HEADLINING KAWASAKI'S ZEN-NIPPON NISAI YUSHUN

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Tuesday, Dec. 12, 2017) – The Japan Road to the Kentucky Derby Presented by Woodford Reserve continues Wednesday at Kawasaki Racecourse as **G1 Racing Co. Ltd.**'s promising unbeaten colt **Le Vent Se Leve (Jpn)** heads a field of 14 2-year-olds in the one-mile Zen-Nippon Nisai Yushun – Japan's premier dirt race for juveniles.

This is the first year that the Zen-Nippon Nisai Yushun, a **National Association of Racing (NAR)** race that often decides Japan's champion 2-year-old dirt horse, has been added to the Japan Road to the Kentucky Derby. Wednesday's race is the second of three races that comprise the Japan Road to the Kentucky Derby, which could produce a starter in America's greatest race, the 144th running of the \$2 million Kentucky Derby Presented by Woodford Reserve (Grade I) on May 5.

Three weeks ago, **Takashi Muraki's Ruggero (Jpn)** defeated **Kiratto One Co. Ltd.'s Mic Ben Hur (Jpn)** by a half-length in the series' first race, the \$172,839 Cattleya Sho over one mile at Toyko Racecourse, to garner 10 points and top the early Japan Road to the Kentucky Derby leaderboard. **Meiner Yukitsubaki (Jpn)** was another nose back in third and was followed by **Bronze Kay (Jpn)** in fourth.

Like the Cattleya Sho, points awarded to the Top 4 finishing positions in the Zen-Nippon Nisai Yushun will be 10-4-2-1. The points will escalate to 30-12-6-3 for the series' final race, the one-mile Hyacinth at Tokyo Racecourse on Feb. 18.

The Japan Road to the Kentucky Derby is a separate sequence of three races from America's 35-race "Road to the Kentucky Derby" series. Only one invitation to compete in the 1 ¼-mile Kentucky Derby at world-famous Churchill Downs in Louisville, Ky. will be extended with preference given to the horses with the most points in the Japan Road to the Kentucky Derby series. No invitation will be extended beyond the Top 4 point earners. If two or more horses have the same number of points, the tiebreaker is lifetime earnings.

Le Vent Se Leve (Jpn) is trained by **Kiyoshi Hagiwara**, who campaigned last year's Zen-Nippon Nisai Yushun winner and Japan Road to the Kentucky Derby point-leader **Epicharis (Jpn)**. Following a seven-length debut win over 1 1/8 miles at Niigata in August, Le Vent Se Leve (Jpn) tested stakes company in the \$172,810 Platanus Sho at Tokyo on Oct. 14 and cruised to win by 2 ½ lengths while clocking one mile in the slop in 1:36.20 – a juvenile track record.

The son of Symboli Kris S will break from post 9 in Wednesday's Zen-Nippon Nisai Yushun and will be ridden by regular rider **Mirco Demuro**.

Chief streaking rivals include **Hayabusa Maca O (Jpn)**, a Sinister Minister colt who improved to 3-for-3 with a neck victory in the \$293,040 Hyogo Junior Grand Prix at Sonoda over seven furlongs on Nov. 21; **Don Fortis (Jpn)**, a son of Henny Hughes ridden by legendary **Yutaka Take** who collected his third straight win when taking the \$265,200 Hokkaido Nisai Yushun by 1 ½ lengths in the mud at Mombetsu on Oct. 31; and **Dark Repulser (Jpn)**, the Hard Spun half-brother to past Japanese dirt star **Espoir City (Jpn)** who is perfect in two starts after winning the \$170,914 Oxalis Sho over seven furlongs at Tokyo on Nov. 11.

The complete Zen-Nippon Nisai Yushun field from the rail out: **Dombey (Jpn)**, Hayabusa Maca O (Jpn), Dark Repulser (Jpn), **Happy Grin (Jpn)**, **Tosen Bull (Jpn)**, **Soy Cowboy (Jpn)**, **Riko Walther (Jpn)**, Don Fortis (Jpn), Le Vent Se Leve (Jpn), **Damonde (Jpn)**, **Haseno Pyro (Jpn)**, **Southern Vigorous (Jpn)**, **Mr Bach (Jpn)** and **Big Smoky (Jpn)**.

Two horses based in Japan have run in the Kentucky Derby: **Ski Captain** (14th in 1995) and **Lani** (ninth in 2016). **U Carrot Farm's Epicharis (Jpn)** was last year's point leader after a three-quarter length victory in the Hyacinth. He'd later run second in the UAE Derby (GII) but quarantine matters made it problematic for the colt to be seriously considered for the Derby. Instead, Epicharis (Jpn) targeted the Belmont Stakes (GI) but was scratched on the morning of the race after inflammation was detected in his right front leg.